

ANNUAL REPORT TO THE CONGREGATION
Unitarian Universalist Church of Greensboro
2013-14 Church Year

PART 2: 2013-14 MINISTER – MINISTRY PILLAR

A. REFLECTING UPON THE YEAR

It has been a great first year serving UUCG as a Developmental Minister. As such, I am an employee of the Board of Trustees, working within the parameters of a formal contract that was just extended for two more years.

As with any UU minister I am engaged to perform all the normal responsibilities of congregational ministry, including worship, spiritual and pastoral leadership, administration, and justice work in the wider community.

I will have led worship services 34 times by the end of July, officiated at the wedding of two members (Karen Madrone and Michelle Giorgi), and the memorial service of another (Liz Harrell).

In addition, the goals of this developmental ministry were to help UUCG with:

Discerning Identity – by increasing the congregational focus on the tradition, history and larger community of UUism.

I approached this goal primarily through sermon topics, often highlighting UU historical figures and the defining themes within our living tradition. I also taught adult religious education classes focused on furthering this goal. I modeled prophetic witness in the larger community through Moral Monday protests and other advocacy efforts, as well as fully participating in the district, regional and continental UU movement.

Deepening Right Relations – by establishing shared behavioral covenant expectations, and developing resources and practices to address conflict.

Based on my experience that a “shared behavioral covenant” will naturally happen when trust is the norm, I intentionally slowed down what I perceived as a legalistic approach rather than an adaptive one to effect what certainly is a needed cultural change within this congregation’s life. Learning to trust ministerial and lay leadership when that trust has been broken takes time. Much of my work this first year was on establishing and maintaining ministerial “authority” in a way that in the long term will hopefully have the effect of us all relaxing into relationship, rather than reacting with mistrust, fear or anger! Thus, I sought to work within the kind of boundaries that engender mutual trust. Of course, there were inevitable points of conflict this first year, yet I believe that moving through those not only helped the congregational system to learn that it can rely on its leaders to stay in relationship, to be open to changing circumstances,

to take immediate action when threats to stability are real, and to see a system of leaders that can reliably move to insure the safety of all while maintaining a focus on deepened relationships, and of course get out there in the world and make a real difference!

Strengthening Stewardship – by developing a culture of stewardship, whereby all members pledge and contribute to the financial health of the church and also contribute their time and talents to the governance, hospitality and spiritual life of the church.

Entering a system that had already enacted a bylaw level expectation that all members would pledge and fulfil at least some portion of that pledge, I chose to work directly with the Annual Commitment Time board committee in the stewardship/pledge campaign for the 2014/15 to try to make that bylaw standard procedure. My approach was to emphasize two things. One, that everyone be given a way to tap into their own identity as “generous” persons. Knowing that there are varying ways to approach this identity, I thought it best to focus on members’ need to give, rather than the congregation’s need to receive. Thus the theme “we are the people who...” And the kick off sermon which detailed differing motivations for giving. Secondly, any and all pledges were welcomed and “generously” received. Every person/family that pledge received a thank you card! Next year there may be the introduction of an expectation that giving is expected to be at a certain percentage of income, but this year sort of expectation was not a factor. This year’s approach put the pledge campaign ahead of the creation of the budget. Thus, planning to expend what has been promised to come in came second, rather than the other way around. Deciding what needs to be spent first, and then expecting that amount be pledged is counter to a feel-good success around the touchy subject of money! Which we achieved!

Clarifying Membership- changing the expectations of membership so that there is a definite path to meaningful engagement and broad awareness of the roles and responsibilities of members.

I initiated regularly occurring New Member Orientation sessions open to all those expressing interest in joining. After attending one of those sessions, those who choose to sign the book, were recognized and welcomed during a Sunday Service about 30 days later. This has brought 22 new members since I arrived. The total membership number at this date is 177. That is a slight net loss from last year’s February report to our UUA. Yet, that number, post this year’s pledge campaign and post this year’s focus on intentional membership, reflects a body of committed and engaged members.

In sum, these four developmental tasks influenced how I interacted with the Ministry Teams as did the governance structure that was already in place, that I came into, which provides that the minister is the chief of the staff and the ministry teams.

B. THE STAFF AND THE MANY ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE MINISTRY TEAMS

What follows is a narrative summary of the work of each ministry team. It ought to be noted that by mid-year, I asked all the teams to take a look at their existing charters and to amend or revise those documents as necessary to better reflect what each team was currently doing. And I asked that the Coordinating Council meetings, which had previously included all ministry team leads as well as all board committee chairs, under the lead of the Vice President and the minister, meet quarterly rather than monthly. That change allowed for me to meet with only the ministry team leads during the months which did not include quarterly council meetings.

As I mentioned, the current governance structure provides that the Director of Music, the Church Administrator, and the Director of (Youth) Religious Education report to me. We do meet every other week and relate as professional colleagues, and are in constant contact with each other by electronic means. All three of UUCG's professional staff persons now have updated Letters of Agreement and are fairly compensated per UUA guidelines. We are in good and harmonious relationship all working towards the four developmental goals.

The ministry teams I work directly with are:

Adult Faith Formation, formerly called Adult Religious Education, which was thoughtfully led this year by Steve Pearsall. Steve coordinated, publicized and often led the Sunday morning Adult Faith Formation sessions, except for first Sundays which was under the direction of the Healthy Congregations board committee. Adult Faith Formation teachers included Nina Namaste, Ken Knight, Sharin Francis, Joe Gecinger, Nelson Stover and Susan Hill. I led a series of sessions, including "Faith Like a River" and "Promises, Promises" on Thursday evenings. The Deep River Sangha, as well as the Sunday Meditation Group, are now included in UUCG's Adult Faith Formation offerings. In the coming year Nina Namaste will co-lead the Adult Faith Formation team. Under her leadership classes will reflect the "all – congregation" monthly themes that will be introduced along with the small group ministry efforts of the Chalice Circle groups. Eventually, the Sunday morning and the Thursday evening classes will be the same. And in a few years, the Youth Religious Education program may also participate in what is known as "theme-based" ministry.

The **Care Team** was ably led by the dependable Sara Bourquin. She and her crew steadfastly provide meals, run errands, provide transportation, and attend to any other of the "practical" things members or their families might need help with during an illness or an ongoing health concern. New members are asking to be part of this quiet but effective team. The Care Team also includes the **Memorial Services Team**, which was and will continue to be called on to help with the practical details related to end of a life celebrations held at UUCG, of which there were several this church year. There were memorial services just before I arrived for UUCG friend Jean Laidlaw's father, William Richard Laidlaw; in early September for long time member Liz Harrell, and just this past week for the husband of our long time renter Debbie Devine of The Learning Palette, Kevin Devine.

The **Denominational Affairs** Team was also led by Steve Pearsall. By a vote of his peers Steve became the Moderator of the Central NC Cluster this year and he continued to faithfully participate in all cluster, district, nearby regional and associational gatherings. He was able to motivate a large group of folks to fill snack bags for the UU/Standing on the Side presence during the Mass Moral March in Raleigh in February and helped recruit a large contingent of members and friends participate in the march itself. Although numerous members have attended General Assemblies in years past and will again this June, there are many more opportunities for UUCG members to broaden their experience of UUism in terms of both cluster and regional participation.

The **Developmental Ministry Team** led by the always reflective Joan Skokan, includes Betsy Lindsey, Marty Bergman, Tim Leisman and Steve Andrews meets monthly with me. Their role is to help facilitate this period of developmental ministry with their insight and experience. They will share their annual report with the Board during the June Board meeting.

The **Justice Action Team**, formerly the Social Action Team, was under the progressive lead of Sue Cole, Sara Bourquin and Becky Floyd. They expanded the Share Half (of all Sunday undesignated offerings) program to every Sunday. Over \$400 has been collected and shared with each of the nine organizations featured from August to March. At the JAT retreat, they decided to focus their efforts on ending hunger and homelessness and environmental stewardship. They continue to support Blood Drives, Weaver House, the annual CROP walk, Urban Ministry food drives, to sell Attraction books for the support of the Shepherd's Center, and they engage in Partnership Village Christmas projects. And, they are adding the Community Housing Solutions as a "hands on" experience. The JAT also partners with the YRE family ministry for the "Taking it T-UU The Streets" program which assembles and distributes care-bags for those in need. They are about ready to distribute a new JAT brochure that will help newcomers know about all the efforts for change that UUCG supports and engages in.

Green Sanctuary sub team supports the multi-church effort, "Environmental Stewardship Greensboro" by collecting Styrofoam, and the **GLBTQ sub team** supports ongoing Welcoming Congregation education and advocacy with speakers, musicians, and other awareness efforts.

Active members of JAT, and its sub teams are: Nancy Powersmith, Ken Knight, Nelson Stover, Dorothy James, Tim Leisman, Tony Stewart, Paul Namaste and Karen Madrone.

The **Lay Pastoral Care Associates** program continued under the caring leadership of Janet Eley. They responded to 32 requests for emotional support from members or friends. They make note of whatever is expressed during Joys and Sorrows and respond appropriately. They sponsored a well-attended and excellent Death and Dying workshop, led by former member Rita Layson. They improved the message and the frequency of the PR about their services. They are seeking to expand their associates with training sessions to be held next fall.

The **Membership Team** was under the enthusiastic leadership of Judy Gecinger. The Sunday visitor table was staffed with a variety of smiling faces. Visitors receive a welcome letter mailed out every Monday. This team sponsors the New Member Orientation classes that take place every other month. All new members are interviewed and presented during a Sunday Service. All new member's photos and stories are featured on the membership bulletin board. A picture directory is being compiled. The membership roll is up to date and includes 22 new members, many with children. All new members from January 2013 were invited to the First Annual New Member reception, which also included board members and membership team members. And this team is sponsoring the creation of Chalice Circles, a new version of Covenant Groups. Leaders for those groups are now in training with me. Chalice circles will begin form in September of 2014.

The **Worship Team** was led by the always conscientious and attentive to details Barbara Hands. Sunday Service logistics, including the **Ushers sub team** (led by Dennis Hands), the training and coordination of service leaders, publication and coordination of the worship schedule and care of guest speakers was reliably attended to. The **Labyrinth/worship sub team**, led by Michelle Lee provided care and biannual use of the portable labyrinth. Carolyn Crumpacker led the **CUUPS sub team**. Members include Nora Bird, Dan Kelly, Leslie Kalinowski, Robin Lewis, Caroline Cook and Dennis Hands.

The fabulous **Director of Music**, Mark Freundt, works directly with the **Music Team**, which was co-led by Sue Sherwood and Marilyn Clayton. It sponsors the September – May Wednesday evening Expressions service, the once a month/Sunday evening/ September – May, Singing Meditation Service, mUUsic on the road, Jazz Nativity, the holiday season Poinsettia sale, Music Ministry Sunday in May, Missa Gaia and occasional traveling musician performances. The Music Team also helps with instrument maintenance, music preservation and supplies pianists when the Director of Music is unavailable.

The highly seasoned and wise **Church Administrator**, Julie Hamilton works directly with **Building and Grounds** which was led by Jim Roeder. This well-functioning team attends to the range of tasks that go beyond routine maintenance and the other duties performed by our custodian, Walter Jones (who also works directly with and for Julie) and also attends to all those other task that fall short of requiring a "professional". Although it is becoming clear that there are an increasing number of jobs that do and will require a pro as our building ages and members shift their attention to mission rather than maintenance, the B&G team is still heroic! A delicate sewer system, aging "unique" toilets, freezing water supply lines, and too much snow, left UUCG without basic services or even access on a few occasions. During these emergencies, an expanded B&G team came to the rescue! Ken Williams, who will serve as

Team Lead beginning in July. There is already an effort underway to reinvigorate the B&G workdays.

The **B&G Labyrinth sub team**under Ken's leadership completed the outdoor labyrinth.

The **Communications Team** also works directly with the Church Administrator and was led by Vance Archer. This team, focused on timely and informative monthly newsletters, while difficult content management software and the loss of the previous website developer made it hard to maintain an appropriately informative website. However, late in the year, a website development firm was engaged and will be guided by Rev. Ann Marie. This website revision effort will provide for a totally new UUCG "front door" for potential UU's who find us via the internet. The revision will continue to include the church's master calendar and a "members-only" section will be added that will hold readily accessible information of interest to members such as the directory, Bylaws, etc.

The **Fellowship Team** led by Cindy Williams is also in partnership with Julie and created a variety of venues for UUCG members and friends to gather for fun and fellowship including the Thanksgiving meal, the Holiday Dinners and the International Dinner. Next year new members, Kay Bishop and Rick Tolley, will co-lead this team.

There was no **Fundraising Team** per se. Although Suzanne Deering worked with the Church Administrator and many others to coordinate a very successful Annual Yard Sale, held indoors! Lauren Houck, with help from Rhoda Glover, also working directly the Administrator and a large team, produced a Cabaret Auction that also exceeded its expected income.

The **Youth Religious Education Team** works directly with the very able **Director of Youth Religious Education**, Cindy Dillard and is led by Heather Rushford. With increasing numbers of children to serve, YRE grew by one new class this year. They always provide childcare in the nursery on Sunday's for infants – 3 year olds, and this year the *Wonderers* (preschoolers – 1st grade), the *Gatherers* (2nd – 5th graders) and the *Sojourners* (6th -12th graders). With enough children for a new class there was also a concurrent need for more teachers, which were recruited. The UU sex education curriculum/Our Whole Lives will be offered at all levels for children and youth next year, now that 2 more teachers have been trained. Efforts directed at future campus ministry outreach came by participation in the Faith Communities Fair at Elon University. Gaming and fellowship space is being provided every Sunday following the worship service for young adults aged 18 – 22. The family ministry program included "Celebrating the Season", a Passover Seder and quarterly all church potlucks. The 9:30 Sunday Adult Faith Formation classes were complimented by the Preschool – 5th grade *Chalice Club* program. Activity packets were created for children to enjoy at those times when they stay in the Sunday worship service. The nursery program now has an effective policy, and is well on its way to staffing with only non-member personnel, so that all members, especially parents, may fully participate in congregational life. If the proposed budget for 2014/15 is approved the DRE's

hours will go from 16 to a very needed 20 per/week. Donya Lucas has gracefully served as nursery coordinator and childcare provider.

I also worked closely this initial year, of course with the board itself and with the board committees: Accountability, Annual Commitment Time, and Finance.

C. GOING FORWARD

Next year, I envision having more time for involvement within Greensboro community, particularly through my participation with liberal clergy groups that exist. I fully intend for UUCG to participate in Greensboro Pride. On a regional level, I hope to help create a Developmental Ministry congregations cluster that UUCG could be in “virtual” partnership with. Nationally, there may be an opportunity for us to partner with All Souls, DC and other NC UU congregations within the arena of voting rights for all in NC.

Within congregational life, my efforts will be to assure that the forming Chalice Circles offer another place for deepened relationships and for engendering trust and community. (Laura Graham has offered to coordinate this version of small group ministry.) I hope to increase the variety of worship services and broaden the multi-cultural, multi-generational content and appeal. I hope to work closely with the Strategic Planning board committee to help with a process that leads to a vision and mission statement that is compelling and concise...such as: “We are the People Who: connect, grow, serve!” our pledge campaign theme for this year.

To date I have taken 3 weeks (non-contiguous) of the 4 allowed for vacation time, and none yet of the 4 weeks (non-contiguous) allowed for study leave. So, you will see me on Sundays through the end of July, but during the week, I may be studying babies!

I have just completed serving on the Southeast District Board as an at large trustee. I remain the Treasurer of the Southeast UU Ministers Association, am serving as the Administration Curator for UUMA-Connect a brand new continuing education online resources related to the Fulfilling the Call document used in our ministry evaluative materials. I continue to be a Settlement Representative for the UUA Transitions office, working directly with those congregations in search for their next called minister in the Southern Region.

It has been a challenging and satisfying first year, and I look forward to at least two more!

Rev. Ann Marie Alderman